

# Is God Unjust?

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[ 0 : 00 ] I want you guys to open your Bibles to the book of Romans.

We're in Romans chapter 3 this morning, and we are going to continue what we started last week. Last week we began looking in chapter 3, and verses 1-8 of chapter 3 really form one sort of unit in which the Apostle Paul begins to answer potential objections, potential questions that might arise out of his teaching from Romans chapter 2.

And so we began to look at those answers to potential objections last week, and we're going to continue to look at those this week. And so this week we're going to look at verses 5-8. And I know several of you are visiting with us, but when we read God's Word together, I always ask you all to stand in honor of the Word.

So if you're able to, I want to ask you guys to stand as we read together. Romans chapter 3, verses 5-8, the Apostle Paul writes, But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say?

That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? I speak in a human way. By no means. For then, how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God's truth abounds to His glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

[ 1 : 29 ] And why not do evil that good may come? As some people slanderously charge us with saying, their condemnation is just. Father, may Your Spirit now open our eyes to see the truth of the words that He has inspired through the Apostle Paul.

And may we be changed by it. I pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys be seated. We saw last week, in fact, that there are certain questions that arise when we began to dig into God's Word. And when we began to hear the Gospel fully and forcefully proclaimed, which is what the Apostle Paul was doing throughout the book of Romans, questions began to arise.

Paul began, all the way back in chapter 1 of verse 18, Paul began to systematically lay out for us the Gospel. He summarized the Gospel in verses 16 and 17, and then he begins in verse 18 of chapter 1 to explain the Gospel.

This book, the book of Romans, was written by the Apostle Paul to introduce himself to the Christians in the city of Rome, most of whom he had never met and they did not know him, and he wanted to establish a relationship with them.

[ 2 : 44 ] But that means that this book is incredibly helpful to us. Because as Paul laid out the Gospel for the Roman Christians so that they would understand what he taught, he was also laying out the Gospel for you and me 2,000 years later so that we could have a clear view of the truth of God's Word, of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus.

So it is in this book, more than anywhere else in the Bible, that we see the Gospel very clearly, piece by piece, explained to us. And it begins in chapter 1, verse 18, where none of us would want to begin.

It begins with God's own wrath against human sin and unrighteousness. Paul says there that the wrath of God is being revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The Gospel message begins always with God and man and the problem of sin that creates this massive gap between us.

In fact, it does more than create a gap between us. It brings God's wrath upon us. The wrath of God is being revealed against us, sinful people, the Apostle Paul says.

[ 3 : 55 ] And so from that verse all the way to the end of chapter 1, Paul very clearly indicts the Gentile, non-Jewish, we would just call it sort of just a lost secular world.

But in Paul's day it's the Gentile world. And he indicts them with unrighteousness, with a failure to glorify God as He ought to be glorified, a failure to submit to God's revelation of Himself in the created order, to which you could probably hear, if Paul were preaching that message to a Jewish audience, you would probably hear a lot of amens and maybe even some clapping from time to time as he just sort of piles it on for the Gentile people.

But then in chapter 2, he turns his attention to the Jewish people and he begins to systematically lay out why they have the same problem, that they themselves are also unrighteous.

Even though they may possess God's Word, they have not obeyed God's Word. And so that in the end, by the end of chapter 2, Paul concludes that Jewishness by itself and even the great Jewish right of circumcision, which physically separated them from the Gentile peoples, on Judgment Day, Jewishness, circumcision will not count.

It will not help. It will not rescue you from God's wrath because you are, even as a Jew, a sinner. Which led us last week and led the Apostle Paul in chapter 3, verse 1 to ask a really, really important question.

[ 5 : 21 ] Take a look in your Bibles at chapter 3, verse 1. Paul then asks, if the Jew is just as guilty as the Gentile before God on Judgment Day, he says, then what advantage has the Jew or what is the value of circumcision?

What's the point, Paul, we said last week, what's the point of the entire Old Testament and of this book that explains God's choosing of Abraham and his descendants and of his working through Israel throughout all the centuries?

What's the point of all of that, Paul, if at the end of the day, Jews stand just as guilty as Gentiles on Judgment Day before God? And the answer to that question we saw last week was that the Jews have great advantage because they receive from God the oracles of God, the very Word of God itself.

But it is that very Word, we saw, that not only gives promises to the nation of Israel, to the Jewish people, but also gives them warnings. It not only holds out blessings to them, it also holds out curses for them.

So the very privilege of receiving God's Word is the same thing that now has put them in the position of standing under God's wrath because God's Word in the Old Testament is clear.

[ 6 : 36 ] If Israel forsakes the covenant, the covenant curses come upon Israel. And Paul says, not only by their disobedience to the law throughout their history and even now have they forsaken the covenant, but now they stand, he'll show us in chapters 9 and 10, now they stand as those who have rejected the Messiah that God promised in the Hebrew Scriptures.

And so they stand, doubly condemned by God's Word for their failure to heed God's Word. And he brings that sort of argument that God's Word itself teaches the Jewish people that if they reject God's Word, if they disobey God's Word, that they will bring judgment upon themselves.

He brings that, if you guys will recall, he brings that sort of to a conclusion there in verse 4, where he quotes from Psalm 51, where he says, he quotes David, where David says, that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged.

And last week we saw that that little statement, that little snippet from the psalm written by David, is David saying to God after his great sin, that God, if you judge me, even though I am the King of Israel, even though I am David himself, I am called the man after your own heart, if you bring your judgment upon me, I deserve it.

Because I have sinned. Because I have disobeyed your Word. Because I have broken your law. So if you judge me, you are justified in your judging of me. That is, if you judge me, the King of Israel, you are shown to be righteous by judging me.

[ 8 : 14 ] That is what justified means. It shows God to be righteous in His judgment upon David, because David is a sinner. And so Paul's essential conclusion to the question, what's the advantage of being a Jew, is there's great advantage.

You've received God's Word. But God's Word tells us that even David, even David, was deserving of God's judgment for his sin. And if it's true of David, it must be true of all of the Jewish people. In David's sin, God's judgment upon that sin does not show God to be unfaithful to His Word to Israel.

God's judgment upon David's sin shows God to, in fact, be faithful to His Word and to be a righteous God who judges sin. Which brings about another question.

Question number one, what's the advantage of being a Jew? Paul has answered that question effectively. Question number two, though, is a strange question, I think. In fact, I was originally going to preach this entire passage last week.

[ 9 : 23 ] And I spent a lot of time studying. And by Sunday, I felt like I had a good handle on the first four verses, but not the next four. And so I thought, better give myself another week to take a look at those.

Because there's a strange question that follows up here in these verses. And it just sort of makes us scratch our heads. You may have been thinking as we were just reading through it, I hope he takes some time to explain this because we're reading this and it's not making any sense to me what he's saying here.

Because it's a little confusing. You've got to sort of follow the logic of the Apostle Paul. Look at the question itself in verse 5. It's a strange question. What does the advantage of Jewishness make sense?

But this question seems out of place almost. Paul says in verse 5, But if our righteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say?

That God is unrighteous to inflict His wrath on us? That question only makes sense if you've understood the quotation in verse 4 from Psalm 51.

[ 10 : 25 ] Because King David has said in that Psalm that when God judges sinners, even the King of Israel, so even if God judges a Jewish sinner, even the greatest of Jewish sinners, King David himself, when God judges them, God's judgment itself is a demonstration of God's righteousness because it is God doing what He said He would do.

Anytime that God is true to His Word, anytime God shows Himself to be faithful to what He has said, God is once again proven to be a righteous God. And so the question becomes now, okay, but if when we sin and then God judges us, that shows God's righteousness, then isn't at the end of it all God being glorified by showing us that He's righteous through judging us?

And if at the end of the day our sin is giving God an opportunity to show that He's righteous and to glorify Himself, isn't that a good thing? So then, why is God judging us if our sin is leading to a good result?

You see how confusing that kind of thinking is? You see how strange that sounds? But those are the kinds of questions, those are the kinds of objections that the Apostle Paul would have heard as he traveled from city to city preaching.

In fact, I think that these kind of objections are even prevalent today. They're not always worded in that way, but I think that these kind of objections are designed to sort of just throw us off, to ask a question that is almost so confusing at the beginning of it when you begin to try to figure out where the question is coming from and what it's like.

[ 12 : 12 ] To ask that kind of question is really to try to throw us off entirely and to try to get us off balance. It's a kind of word game.

And people play word games all the time. And you'll find that as you begin to share the gospel with people, as you begin to try to explain to people what you believe, that sometimes people will begin to play word games and try to ask questions not necessarily to get good, solid answers, but certain questions will be asked just to try to throw things off.

Because at the end of it all, this question is a circular sort of question and it cannot have a direct clear answer, can it? It can't.

Think about the question itself. If God's judgment upon sinners gives God the opportunity to judge us and that judging shows His righteousness and if showing God's righteousness is good, therefore our sin produces something good, why does God judge us for in the end producing something good?

But if God didn't judge us, then our sin would just be there and then there would be no good product from it. You see how it's circular? I mean, some of you have lost you already and that's okay because I think this is designed to confuse us.

[ 13 : 27 ] Okay? It's circular and it's designed to cut off, to prevent you from being able to effectively complete the task of sharing the gospel and this is the point at which people will often interject these word games because this is in a discussion of human sin and God's wrath and God's righteousness and people don't want to hear that.

That's not a popular message to tell people. It wasn't popular in Paul's day and it's not popular in our day. It's not that we're any more wicked or evil than they were back then. This is human nature. Human nature, sinful human beings do not want to be taught about these sorts of things and so we begin to play word games and ask impossible questions that take us down a rabbit trail to no answer whatsoever.

In fact, I believe that most of these sorts of questions are questions that center around this one issue that Paul brings up and that is the righteousness of God.

we could boil down the question to one simple thing. Is God unjust? Is God unrighteous?

[14:43] Whether you word it in a way that we find like here in verse 5 that's confusing or you just say it simply, the question boils down to when God judges people, is there something about that judgment?

Is there something about God's activity in that that makes him unrighteous or unjust? In fact, we see this same sort of question. I want you to turn over to Romans chapter 9 because as I told you last week, these first eight verses of chapter 3 really are looking ahead to things that Paul's going to discuss in more detail in chapters 9 through 11.

But we're just getting a quick answer here in chapter 3. But if you look in chapter 9, Paul again asks the same kind of question in verse 14. He asks it this way, what shall we say then?

Is there injustice on God's part? Is there injustice? Is God somehow in His inflicting of wrath upon sinful people, even sinful Jews, Paul says, that's the issue in chapter 3, that's the issue in chapter 9 again, is God somehow unrighteous to do that?

But, it's a fundamental question. Can God be declared by people to be unrighteous? Can we make that sort of a statement?

[16:09] Paul asks this question in a number of ways in our passage. He asks it in verse 5. Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? Look down again in verse 7. If through my lie God's truth abounds to His glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

That's the same basic kind of question. If my rejection of the truth results in God being glorified in judgment, why am I still being condemned? And then he asks it in a broad sort of way in verse 8. Why not do evil that good may come? And he says, some people slanderously accuse us of saying such things. So, three different ways, three different times in this passage he asks the question that he must have been asked over and over as he traveled from city to city.

In light of God's judgment, is God somehow unrighteous or unjust? It is one of the most important and most fundamental questions that we can ever ask.

And I've heard it from a number of different angles and a number of different sources and asked in a number of different ways. So, I think it's helpful that Paul asks it in three different ways in this passage because we hear it using different terminology and different phraseology from different people.

[17:18] Most of the time from people outside of the church, but at times in certain discussions you'll even hear it from people inside of the church. So, let's just spend a little bit of time talking about how this question is sometimes posed to us, how sometimes this question is asked so that you can be prepared to give some sort of response to give some sort of reply to these sorts of questions.

This week I was looking through a book, it was a compilation of essays by well-known atheist scholars. Just a pretty thick book, pretty substantial book and it was designed to refute Christian refutations of atheism so it was a fairly in-depth book.

But one of the chapters in that book was titled, Is Yahweh, that is His God, Is Yahweh a moral monster? To which the author by the end of the chapter of course concludes, yes, the God of the Bible is a moral monster.

Which is really just a modern way of him saying, I believe that the God of the Bible is unrighteous. I believe, he's saying, the writer's saying, that the things I see God doing and saying in the Bible demonstrate that God is somehow immoral, unjust, unrighteous.

So, we sometimes hear these sorts of objections from a non-Christian standpoint. They're from outside, they're looking in and they're saying, the God that you worship is not good.

[18:52] The God that you worship is not righteous and not just. And therefore, I reject Him. And then sometimes, I've even heard a similar objection from those who claim to be Christians.

Because of course, the Bible teaches us that God, in all that He does, works for His own glory. We see that throughout the Scriptures. It's one of the foundational truths that we teach at our church. You can find it on our website very clearly. You can find it in all of our teaching that God, in all that He does, is pursuing His own honor and glory. And that, in fact, is the definition of righteousness. And I have even heard Christians say, in fact, there was a guy that I was in seminary with, I didn't know him very well, to be honest with you. I had a couple of classes with him. And I had a discussion with him in the library one day and we were talking about this. And his response to the Bible teaching about God doing all things for His own glory was, I don't believe that. [19:54] To which I said, but it says it right here, it's not complicated, it's not difficult. And he said, but I can't believe that because that makes God selfish. And if God is selfish, then God is not good and He's not righteous.

It's the same essential objection that you're hearing from the secular atheist. That if God is the kind of God that the Bible depicts Him to be, they're saying that I don't believe that He's good. I don't believe that He's just. I don't believe that He's righteous. So how do you respond to that kind of objection? If somebody says to you, your God is an unjust God, how do you respond to that sort of objection?

On one level, it strikes at sort of the heart of the Christian faith or it strikes at what we might call foundational truths. Alright?

There are always things, if you dig down to the bottom of anybody, whether it be a Christian or a Muslim or an atheist or anyone, if you dig down to the bottom of all of their statements and everything that they claim to believe, you always eventually arrive at what we might call the foundation, the bottom of it all.

[21:04] In other words, you can't dig beyond that. You can't get beyond that. Everybody has some sort of foundation. Everybody has something that you cannot question. I'll give you an example.

If you talk to, say, a secular atheist and you say, how do you know the difference between right and wrong? Because a lot of times we say, well, if you're an atheist, there's no standard for right and wrong.

There's no objective standard. And so, how do you have any morals? And yet, most atheists are not mass murderers or serial killers or anything. Most of them live normal sort of lives in the midst of society.

And so, upon what basis do they, what do you base your morality upon? How do you know the difference between right and wrong? And you'll get varied answers. Sometimes you'll get an answer like, well, whatever does the least harm to the people around me is what's good.

Okay. So, how do you determine that criteria? How do you arrive at that? Well, because I don't want to do harm to the people around me and so, that's my principle.

[22:08] I understand that. But how, how do you arrive at that, at that particular marker? How do you decide that that's how you're going to determine right from wrong?

And you can't dig beneath that because it is foundational. It's foundational. Everybody has a basic sort of rock bottom foundation upon which they base everything that they believe whether they recognize it or not.

And as Christians, we do as well. We call it the Word of God. It's just, it's true. We trust it. We know it. But, but at the center of the Word is this message about who God is.

That God is holy and righteous. This is His basic character. And so, we call into His question, His basic character is to strike at the foundation of the Christian faith.

It's to strike at the base. And because you can't dig beneath the base, on one level, the answer to the question, is God unjust to inflict His wrath upon us?

[23:15] Is God unrighteous? The answer can only be exactly what it is here in this text and in Romans chapter 9. Verse 6, take a look in chapter 3, verse 6, Paul responds, by no means.

Some of your translations say God forbid or absolutely not. This is the strongest form in which Paul could express the answer no. Absolutely not. Is God unrighteous? No, He's not unrighteous.

Why isn't He unrighteous, Paul? Because He's God. That's the answer. Because He is who He is.

And so, we ask the question, what do we mean when we say that God is righteous?

Have you ever wondered what we mean by that? Have you ever wondered, what exactly are we saying? What is the Bible saying when it tells us that God is righteous? Here's what the Bible is not

saying, okay?

The Bible is not saying that God is righteous when He measures up to a standard of righteousness that we can identify outside of Himself. You see that?

[ 24 : 21 ] God is not measured by anyone's list of here's what you need to look like and here's how you need to behave in order to be righteous. God's not measured by any sort of standard outside of Himself because He is God.

We measure our own righteousness by God's Word. Are we righteous? I don't know, let's look at God's Word, let's look at the Ten Commandments and other things and see if we measure up to the standard of righteousness in God's Word.

How do you measure God's righteousness? Not by any sort of standard outside of Himself. God's righteousness by its definition is God's commitment to uphold and preserve and display His own beauty and glory in the world.

So that by definition, all that God does in pursuit of His own glory, automatically is a righteous thing to do. To which someone might say, that's a circular argument.

You can't say just because God does something, it's righteous because He is God. To which I respond, it's foundational. You can't get beneath that.

[ 25 : 27 ] You can't go beyond that. The Bible declares God is holy. God is righteous. God is just.

And then the Bible uses God as the standard by which we discover what is holy and righteous and just.

How do you answer the question, is God unjust? On one level, as a believer, as a follower of Christ, you say, of course, He is righteous.

He cannot be unrighteous because by definition, everything that God does is right and good and true. Because everything that God does, He does for His own honor and glory and praise, ultimately, in an ultimate sense.

By no means is God unjust. unjust. It's not possible for Him to be unjust because of who He is. But then sometimes we hear this question not coming from sort of the outside secular perspective in which the entire foundations are being sort of challenged and uprooted and ignored.

[ 26 : 49 ] Sometimes we hear this sort of question from those that we might, at least on some level, consider to be inside. Although we're sometimes talking about people who, at the end of the day, deny basic Christian doctrine and we wouldn't label them as true followers of Christ.

Nevertheless, they're not denying the existence of God. They're not attempting, at least in their own minds, to challenge the very foundations. But in light of what the Bible teaches about particular things, they begin then to question, if that's true, it looks to me like God's not righteous.

Let me give you what I think is a good example of this. I'll give you two examples of this. It has, over the last maybe ten years or so, it's sort of gotten popular among certain writers and pastors and theologians to challenge the idea that Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sins.

To challenge the idea that that Jesus on the cross took upon himself the punishment that you and I actually deserve. Which is what Paul clearly teaches later in this chapter that we'll get to in a few weeks.

The idea that Jesus is dying on the cross, not for anything he did and not simply to give us an example of what it looks like to serve God all the way to death, but Jesus is actually taking upon himself the penalty for my sins and the sins of everyone who ever trusts in him.

[ 28 : 16 ] God's wrath that we deserve is poured out on Jesus. The technical theological term for that is a substitutionary atonement. That Jesus died as our substitute and in our place.

And it has become popular in some theological circles to challenge that understanding of what Jesus was accomplishing upon the cross. And I have read a number of writers, I'm not sure who originated this phrase, although I think I might know, but I'm not positive.

I'm not sure who originated this phrase, but it has become popular among a number of writers to refer to the teaching that Christ died for our sins in our place as cosmic child abuse.

I've seen that little three word phrase in a number of books. Cosmic child abuse. And the line goes something like this. If any human father punished one of his children in the place of another one of his children, we would say that's a bad dad.

That's child abuse. You don't punish a kid for something that kid didn't do. And so then they read that back upon God and say, God couldn't punish Jesus for something Jesus didn't do. That's cosmic child abuse.

[ 29 : 25 ] Because if God were to do that, they say, he's an abuser, which is another way of saying he's unrighteous. His substitutionary atonement is real. God is unrighteous.

So now we're getting a challenge from those who are sort of claimed to be within the Christian faith, a challenge to God's righteousness based upon what the Bible says about what Jesus was doing on the cross.

And so you again ask the question, is God unrighteous in pouring his wrath out on his own son? We could answer this simply with a by no means. He is God and by definition everything he does is righteous. But we'll move beyond that a little bit with this question.

Move down in chapter three. Look all the way down to the verse that you know well in verse twenty three, giving you a glimpse of what we're going to do in a few weeks. Paul says in verse twenty three, all of sin and fall short of the glory of God.

[ 30 : 29 ] Verse twenty four and are justified by his grace as a gift for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Here's how that happens. Here's how sinners get right with God or get justified.

OK, it happens because verse twenty five, God put forward Christ as a propitiation. That word means a sacrifice that receives and removes wrath.

So God put forward Jesus to receive his own wrath, to remove his wrath from us by his blood to be received by faith. And this, this pouring out of God's wrath upon his son was to show God's righteousness.

So Paul's answer to that kind of question would be no. God pouring out his wrath on his son does not show God to be unrighteous. It does the opposite.

And it shows God to be righteous. Because God is what? In the passage. Look again.

[ 31 : 33 ] This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The issue here is not how can God be righteous to pour out his wrath on Jesus. For Paul, the question is, since people have sinned and God did not judge them all, he did not pour out his wrath on Abraham or David or many or all the other Old Testament saints in the Old Testament, nor does he pour out his wrath on those who trust in Jesus now.

So how can a holy God not pour out his wrath on sinners? How can he not? Because he pours out his wrath on another for their sins.

You see, if God's righteousness is his commitment to uphold and preserve his own glory, and if sin is a refusal to give God glory, then God's righteousness itself demands that he punish sin.

And yet he has not punished us all. Has he? He has forgiven the sins of all those who trust in Jesus. And Paul says, the pouring out of God's wrath on Jesus, far from showing God to be unrighteous, shows that he is, in fact, righteous.

[ 32 : 59 ] Is God unjust? Trust. By no means. Not in any way. Let me give you one more example. And then we'll close. I know this is a lot of sort of head stuff today, but this is a very hard passage.

Okay? Let me give you one more example that I hear. And this one is going to head a little closer to home because this is an objection that you hear from genuine professing followers of Jesus who have a tough time with certain portions of Scripture.

Asking the question, if God acts in this way, if God does this, which you're saying the Bible says he does, to me that looks like God's unjust. Turn over to Romans chapter 9.

We've already looked there once because Paul asks this question there in Romans chapter 9 verse 14. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? But when we look more broadly at chapter 9 and we say, what exactly is Paul addressing there?

In particular, what is it about God in Romans chapter 9 that has caused Paul to have to answer the question, does God doing this make God unjust?

[ 34 : 12 ] Well, the issue being discussed in Romans chapter 9 is the issue of election or predestination, as we often call it. Take a look all the way back in verse 10.

We'll jump in sort of in the middle of Paul's argument where Paul is giving examples of election or predestination from the Old Testament. Verse 10. Not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and it did nothing either good or bad in order that God's purpose of election might continue.

So there's election. Not because of works, but because of him who calls. She, Rebecca, the mother of these two sons, was told the older will serve the younger as it is written, Jacob, I love, but Esau I

hated.

In other words, what Paul is saying here is that before Jacob and Esau had done anything good or bad. So God's decision is not based upon anything that they do in their lives. Not that he foresees that they will do in the future.

Not that they have already done. It's not based on anything that they do before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad. God simply decided, Jacob, not Esau.

[ 35 : 26 ] Pour my love on Jacob. I reject Esau. Why God? What did they do? They're not born yet. They didn't do anything. I decided. It's my purpose of election.

To which we often respond, I do not like that. I do not like the way that sounds. If that's what God is like, God is unrighteous.

You see, we find ourselves in danger of looking at something the Bible says. Now, there are all sorts of implications of this sort of teaching.

There are all sorts of things to be talked about. We'll get to Romans 9 and 10 later on, I promise.

This doesn't imply that we don't evangelize because we're commanded to preach the gospel to all people everywhere.

It does not in any way diminish human responsibility. We'll talk about that later on as well. But when you see a teaching like this, does the thought come into your mind, I don't like that kind of God.

[ 36 : 33 ] I don't want a God who does that. Or when you read the Old Testament and you see God doing things, do you think, I don't like a God like that.

I don't like a God who does that. You're asking the question, is God unjust?

To which Paul responds in verse 14 of Romans 9, the same way he responds in chapter 3, by no means.

There are going to be many things revealed about God and His Word that He does not fully explain to us. There are going to be many things that we see in this Word, particularly here where we're going verse by verse and we're not skipping over things that are uncomfortable.

We're going to cover a lot of uncomfortable things over the years as we walk through God's Word together. And many of those uncomfortable things are going to cause us to go, I don't like that.

That's not the way I've always thought about God.

[ 37 : 35 ] I've never pictured God acting that way or talking that way or doing things that way. And at that moment, we have to decide, does God's Word show me what is true about Him or do I stand in judgment over His Word?

That's the question we always have to ask ourselves. It doesn't matter what the theological issue is. Whether we're struggling with substitutionary atonement or the doctrine of election or things that we read about in the Old Testament, whatever the doctrine might be, whatever it might be that we see about God in His Word, we always, at the end of the day, have to decide, is this Word the foundation that I cannot dig beneath and it tells me what is true about God and shows me what God is like or do I have some sort of external standard?

My own opinions, my own thoughts, the tradition that I've received from others, what I was told growing up as a kid, how I feel, whatever it might be, do I have an external standard by which I, when I read the Bible, call into question God's righteousness?

And I hope the answer that we have for that kind of a question is by no means. The real question I think that Paul is dealing with here in these verses in Romans chapter 3 is, in light of all that I've said, and he has quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures numerous times in chapter 2 and alluded to them in chapter 1, in light of all that I have said, and in particular in light of what I have said from God's Word in what we call verse 4, in light of God's Word is God unrighteous?

Paul says, by no means. Because it is the Word of God. And it shows us. It shows us who He is.

[ 39 : 34 ] And the conclusion at the end of it all, for those who persist in denouncing the God of the Bible as unjust. Now there is a difference between someone who has a different interpretation of Scripture, one that we might identify as a wrong interpretation, and someone who simply says the God of the Bible is unrighteous.

There is a difference there. But for those who persist in saying that God is unrighteous or unjust, Paul has a conclusion. Their condemnation is righteous or just.

And the lesson for us is let us never stand in judgment over God and His Word. The question that this passage forces us to ask ourselves is not at the end of the day, is God unjust?

The question this passage forces us to ask ourselves is, what is our ultimate authority? How do we decide what is unjust?

How do we know what is unrighteous? There was an interesting article that I read this week by Votie Bauckham. You can probably find it online pretty easily.

[ 40 : 51 ] But it's in response to all the stuff that's going on in football and with the Ray Rice scandal. I know some of you don't like football. That's why I don't do a lot of sports illustrations. But it's in the news.

It's not just on football and ESPN. It's on Fox News and CNN and everywhere else. About the issue with this guy guilty of domestic abuse and punching his, I think now, wife and being then suspended by the NFL.

While at the same time, you have others who are going to play today, this afternoon on teams who have been accused of all sorts of other things.

Some of them crimes. Other things that we as Christians would condemn as immoral. And yet, nothing is said about them. Nothing is done about them. And the question that Votie Bauckham asks in that article is, how do we choose?

How does the NFL decide, well, what Ray Rice did is unacceptable, but what these other people did is okay, even though many people would look at it as immoral and we'll just give it a pass.

[ 41 : 58 ] How does the NFL how does any organization decide these are the grounds upon which, these are the lines we draw. We won't accept this, but this over here, eh, it's okay.

How do people decide? That's a question that we're faced with every day. And the answer for us as followers of Christ is, it's shown to us.

It's revealed to us. And we have a standard. And I would encourage those of you who have not yet trusted in Christ to look in your heart and ask yourself the question, how do I know?

Where's my foundation? What do I stand upon? And I offer to you the Gospel of Jesus Christ as firm, solid ground upon which you can stand if you will but trust in Him.

Let's pray. Oh,